



## Liquid Heaven

*(more from David's adventures in London ...)*

This week and next, we'll have another couple of episodes that continue the thread of the story of my year in London, back in the early '70s. In one of the previous stories (story #64), I talked about busking with my flute in front of the Royal Festival Hall. Did that work make me thirsty?

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The very first day I had tried busking at the Festival Hall, I had been taken aback by the large pile of coins I received from the listeners, but I soon developed a way to 'manage' this little business. I prepared a small sack into which I could scoop the money at the end of my performance, and placed this in a satchel along with my flute in its case. Festival Hall concerts usually began quite early in the evening, as the performances had to be over in time for most of the patrons to return home by train, but by the time their performance began, mine was of course over! I had spent the day exploring London, had 'worked' for a half-hour or so, and was now 'free' for the evening!

Now, what would you do in this situation - living in one of the world's great capital cities, with your evenings free every day! Looking back on it all these years later, I can simply sigh with envy; what an incredible opportunity!

We have to remember a few things though - firstly, that the David of that time was a very shy, and quite 'quiet' boy (although honestly speaking, not much has changed in that respect!). And, he had spent most of each day exploring various places in the city and the nearby countryside; he wasn't 'missing out' on interesting experiences! Still another factor was the prevalence of smoking in the culture of that time; every pub and restaurant was hazy with cigarette smoke, and even movies were watched through a cloud of smoke. Put all these things together, and you can see why - most evenings - I just headed back to my little room.

One day though, after packing up my flute and stack of coins, I headed into the lobby of the Festival Hall. Perhaps it was a cold evening, and I wanted to warm up a bit before heading home, I don't remember. The concert had begun, so the lobby was no longer crowded, but the bars and lounge areas were still open. And there and then, for the first time in my life, I decided to 'order myself a drink'. I had - I think - been given sips of beer or wine at the dinner table at home on rare occasions, as my parents were not puritanical about alcohol, but had never actually 'had a drink', let alone order one for myself.

I sat down at one of the bars, a long brightly lit one with comfortable stools. As the bartender approached I had not the slightest idea what to order from him. But there was a poster on the wall in front of me, showing a glass of what looked like beer - at least it was tall and golden-coloured - and that's what I chose, "Give me a Taunton Gold, please."

I was 21 at the time; I am 56 now. I have tasted quite a lot of different things in the intervening 35 years, but I tell you, I can still taste that drink! It was not beer, it was cider. It didn't froth or bubble; it wasn't too cold to taste; it was just a pure liquid gold ... I had never had any idea that a 'drink' could be such an incredible experience!

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It was also pretty strong stuff, and even a 'beginner' though I was, I knew that one was enough. Was it actually a chilly evening? I had no idea; I'm sure I floated all the way home ...

The aftermath of this experience is interesting; for the rest of that year although I did - on rare occasion - return to the bar and have another one, I didn't get in the habit of it. Even to this day, I drink less alcohol in a year than most people drink in a week; I just don't seem to be drawn to it very strongly. Just something in my genes, I suppose.

But the side benefit of that is ... boy, do I remember!

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